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number

A QUARTERLY OF MODERN POETRY

FEATURING

JEANNE McGAHEY

"NOTES ON A BATTLE"

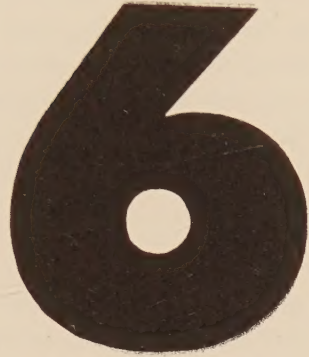
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Spring 1955

this is issue



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MARIE WELLS

MEMORY BY DATA

Returns as peregrine or trespasser
The sickled scene:
Awn in the eye
And kept lark of regret.
By herb, by auspice now
Select the believed continent
And over distances of phosphorous
Locate the precipice
Like a caress.

Meter enumerative within the eye
Spaces such sills of face.
That other slope the falcons fall
And self—
Hawking from scarp
Abrupt and fell as glance—
Shall yet unprick
The keepsakes of the shrike
(So luminous on its thorn
The faceted skull of finch!)
To round and fold again
Over the rancorless contour
Of consent.

And though sometime resound
Deceit like fanfare:
Rumour of conch
In involuntary ear—
Wave-count of drowned
By incandescent keel—
O held by those coasts
Curved in the shell
Belie love's atlas
And its migrant reef.

A LETTER FROM

JEANNE McGAHEY

"NOTES ON A BATTLE"

San Rafael, Calif.

February 15, 1955

Dear Bob Brotherson,

You have asked me to say something about my current work in poetry at a time which is both awkward and pertinent, since I'm working right now with a complex and unsolved problem.

However, it's likely there never would be a time at which I wouldn't have such a problem with poetry, and probably a difficult one, and perhaps there will be something interesting in the problem itself.

It seems to me that there is an easy way—a relatively easy way—to write poetry, and a hard way.

More about the hard way later. But almost all of my work till now has been written in what I would call the easy way.

I almost never began a poem with an idea. Rather I began with some strong centralized emotion which was in a sense nameless, and which I then developed as a tune, or theme. Until the poem was finished, I would not look at this emotion for any kind of direct content.

With the emotion as a key, or governor, I would begin to create, or to find, images or phrases: these might come through automatic writing, random devices, fragments I picked up from conversations, street signs, newspaper stories, anything: but if they fitted and were right, the emotion itself would seem to recognize them and net them in.

Content occurred as the poem occurred: but by discovery rather than by deliberate development.

In *Year with Wars*, for instance, I did not actually know that the feeling of uneasy sadness I had in regard to war was actually a strong sense, reasonable or not, of personal guilt:

Sometimes among their winds and lions
Surprise the boneless fawns.

Here is my hand—

Oh all the perfumes of Arabia could not sweeten.
How the pigeons stare
Out of the circles of their eyes . . .

And until I wrote the poem *Road to Chicago*, I did not actually know in terms of idea that the very strong emotion I always got from the appearance of a city meant that I really saw such a city as double. I saw it once as itself in terms of skyscrapers, Chryslers and whatever... and again as a ruined city: as if looking back upon it from a thousand years... barbaric now in its crudeness and violence, barbaric again through ruin....

Dragging the carts
That are carved like cemeteries
(Oh beasts with the white eyes)
We have counted the thousand stairs
With the water stains
 the tilt like slabs
Of the old towers
 the cornices
With their crowns of fingers . . .

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... Heads that are blind and wider than terraces
Loom from their cliffs of stones.

The forgotten words
Are written with holes and arrows...

The greater content of poetry would appear to have this comfortable habit of residing underground. This content is in its sources enormous, complex, violent and ancient. It is also curiously universal. Overlying it, and readily reached for what it's worth is the structure of opinion, idea, decision, prejudice which is not only what we think, but what we think we think, what we suppose we feel, or should feel: which in most of us is mentalized, limited, and very seldom indeed the material of poetry.

Now it seems to me that the ways of mining the deeper levels of the consciousness for what you actually have to say are only technically difficult, and are limited only by your limitations in the technique. Content in terms of poetry can be arrived at obliquely, slipped up on, surprised, by various procedures of release: and made usable by conscious disciplines.

I have found it possible to learn on conscious levels what words will do and what they will not do, and long and persistent drill in these disciplines has a way of penetrating to the less accessible part of the mind from which, for me, poetry comes. So that as one becomes more consciously adept in poetry there comes to be a subconscious area which is itself trained and more skillful.

This then is the method upon which I've relied for most of my work.

However, somewhere around two years ago, I became increasingly interested in, and moved by, some of the source material connected with Eliot's *Wasteland*—some of the Grail legends primarily, and the enormous body of related myth.

I had no wish to begin working overtly with content. But with no intention of doing so, since it was so much opposed to all my way of working, I found more and more that I had a structure of complex, involved and many-rooted things that I wanted very much to say and say in poetry—and that these things had formulated not just as emotion, although they were emotional, very—but as idea. And I found that the techniques in which I had been working were unsuited to dealing with this more open material.

As my Uncle Clarence used to say, "There was my panther alive and spitting, and there I was, aholt of it by the tail."

I suppose what actually happened was that subconscious content from which I had been cautiously drawing for years was abruptly focussed on a conscious level: and having this in statement terms I no longer knew just how to pull it through that particular process of the underground which gives poetry, for me, and is determined to work in the dark.

For one thing I had become more familiar, through reading of varied source material, with the curious lingo of symbol which seems to me the apparently universal language of the deeper than conscious mind. When these symbols were thrown up almost as a by-product in automatic writing, they were a tip-off: they would again and again, and prematurely, give away the show to my conscious awareness before the poem occurred. Then I would begin to try to make

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the poem say what I knew I meant. I would become interested in the poem, rather than moved by it: and interest is not enough for poetry.

What was most fascinating and exasperating was that almost everything I wanted to pull together and say has been said for generations, in fragments, scraps of myth, fairy-tale, legend, folk-saying, obscure rite, fantasy, dream—one piece here and one piece there. What Eliot has done of course is to find a way of keying in upon mass wisdom of this kind—playing it as if it were an organ board: so that an Eliot poem is not just a poem but a large section of the content of human expression brought alive to your attention. You do not read just Eliot, you read all he refers to, and all that these references refer you to, in a chain reaction that is staggering.

But even if one had, as I do not, the temerity to try to trail those large footsteps, they are so distinctly Eliot, and so alien to the way I have learned to work that the prospect was forbidding.

In the first exhilaration of discovering that I was at least partially hep to what I had been carrying around with me as a sort of mysterious grab-bag, I made the usual mistake of going at it head-on and hacking it out with a shovel: "This is what I mean, and this is what I say" . . . and of course it was no go. The one way I can't say anything is the way which instinct tells me is most natural and easy—that is, direct.

I suppose the reason is simple. The conscious part of the mind is such a newcomer, so thin and limited in comparison with the levels that underlie it, that whatever it thinks, it uses words as a sophomore would use them.

Now I can't believe it isn't valuable and good to know what you think, and what you mean by what you feel. But I do know it brings me up against some baffling lacks in technique.

So what I have been working on, and hope to find, is some new way of re-absorbing what I know I want to say, some way of putting it again through the sea-change of the less conscious levels of thinking.

I have tried several processes. One is, I've simply written down in emotionalized and rhymed prose what I want to say, and then consciously worked upon it to intensify it into either poetic statement, or some kind of associational imagery, keeping the more or less logical structure. This is the hardest way I know to write poetry. To achieve a fortunate phrase or image at random is relatively easy: but to discover the one out of a million possibilities which will be no less effective, but will also do your errand—will also say exactly what you mean, is a very different matter.

Another process I've experimented with: I've tried going way off to one side of what I really want to say: occupying myself with some minor, or unrelated subject (if indeed there is any such): sinking a shaft by automatic writing, random or other familiar device, and then seeing what happens.

The poem I'm including here was done by this means.

Knowing the direct method for the bumbler that it is, I am still going to try to tell by exposition a little of the content that I was concerned with at the time of writing this. Thus, by a very great over-simplification:

I had been puzzling over the recurring theme in myth

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and elsewhere of the "disinheritance" of man: the many stories of the fall: and the feeling almost all individuals have that the human being as we know him, crippled and crooked by what we call his neurotic nature, using a sparse fragment of his powers and being used as a football by the rest, was only a poor substitute either for something that once existed, something that should exist, or even something yet to exist of which we have some glimpse.

What was the nature of this disinheritance? Was it, as we suspect, the loss of, or the failure to develop the full use of what we know to be the almost unlimited potential of the mind? Were these sources cut off from us only by the bogies and monsters of our own insanities?

Most of us have learned to suppose that our neurotic twists are just the other side of being human: that to be human is to be less than sane. And that to rage, to be hostile, jealous, afraid, competitive, greedy, suspicious, desirous of power, apathetic, fretful, was deplorable, but our dear selves: and the fact that a good three quarters of our lives were forfeit to such emotions merely being human.

We have somehow assumed this. We have assumed and been taught that to adjust to one's neurotic nature, to live in comparative peace with it, a sour in-law in the same house, was our best.

Now suppose, I found myself thinking, that we had sold ourselves a bill of goods: that our own belief in our own inevitable sickness might be a fable: that the crippling might be actually no more a part of us than mumps or measles.

And suppose that one explores a fantasy or myth: that the neurosis is rather more in the nature of an invader than

a part: regard that it behaves as a separate entity, has its own intelligence devoted to its own survival: that it protects itself with excellent weapons which it sets up in our skulls—rationalizing, exquisite techniques of concealment, double thinking, evasion, frightening nightmares at the danger points of truth, and the fiction of course that being a part of ourselves it must be protected at all costs. That it has above all things the power to make combines, to attract its own kindred, and to reproduce, to spread from person to person, its chief utensil being the misuse of human language.

Suppose it were possible to define what is actually human—and I think there is no one who doesn't know when he is being human and when he is not.

Suppose that to be human *is*, after all, to be happy, to be free, responsive, creative, relaxed, to be able to love, to have actual problems but not insane ones, and to have abilities and powers far beyond those that are common to us, and an adventure past belief. Suppose, in short that our dearly defended so-called "human" neurosis had cost us the heritage we had every right to . . . and with our own consent.

Suppose further a way of living by which a child were to grow up valuing above all else his potential heritage: aware that the greatest drama and adventure lay that way, and that the so-called fell fascination and excitement of the false, the twisted and the less was only flim-flam, a catch-trap set up by something actually worth no more than human aversion and contempt—not the glamorous life-and-death struggle we like to feel it is. And that the fundamental war of humanity was never the haves against the have-nots, the

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wise against the ignorant, the black against the white, the male against the female, the child against the parent — but always and simply the human being against this masquerader of humanity — and the stakes the highest.

Suppose in short one really and simply grew up wanting to be human because to be human was the jackpot and to be something else was to be cheated.

Now I don't mean there is anything new in this: it has been told us often enough by the wise. In terms of good and evil which have become meaningless, in terms of angels and demons which have been outmoded, in terms of neurotic and non-neurotic which have only made our neuroses more dramatic and as often as not more cherished. Moreover it has been told to us by ourselves ten thousand times in myth.

But I do mean that for me it was realized content. A code, if you please, a belief, a way of stylizing the world in terms that made sense: and I would have liked to transfer into poetry what seemed so real to me in this concept.

I knew that I did not have the means to do this.

I wrote instead about a very different subject. I used for material a specific incident — the details of which are not especially pertinent:

NOTES ON A BATTLE

Heard the wind
Pouring its length
Down a sky like an absolute stranger.
Weather will come of this

I said to my derry
And did come travel.

Surveyor
To gape with a single optic
(Maker of any acre
Out of our named one?)

Came other:
The scavenger:

Old Bottom with his bull's head,
And traffic among corpses.

Look to the witch
I cried
And got to my hayrick.

In the salt marsh
She appears.

In the cow-encircling hills
That rigrag goldilocks and with her bat-wide smile
Insomniac rides.

Oh make a holiday who hear this:
Go write it on big boards,
Fill papers up
With news we were defeated!
Call up the kin
From their ingles:
Bruce from his smoky ingots, Theodore,

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And thirty Margarets shall ride
With a readable banner.

But one must go by the bridge
The home of the eyeless goat
(Perpetual wanderer)
Grip like a handful of aster
That ropy and hideous hide.

I will walk three times
Past the worm in the corn,
I will count my own in a lingo absolute:
And calling that land Toledo,
By rail available,
Ah furious with victory
Will climb
To the hill in the drying meadow.

Crickets will sing
About us like crooked birds,
The night with its many humors
Hap gently our three angels.

Firmament like an Eldorado will be upon us,
Under our heels our earth's broad biscuit.

This is my name and occupation.
If there is other
Must look, look long, and to a longer county.

Knowing these waxes soon undone
Dare grant them this one unlingering—
(Death my persuasion and admittance,
My door's darling)—
Never a long time love.

It is curious that in writing about something I did not even think of as being connected with the above content, I did in fact deal with it obliquely.

Again by discovery, I learned what I identified as the non-human, in the fantasy figures that appear here.

Old Bottom with his bull's head would of course be the minotaur of legend—the overbearing figure which we too often confuse with male, with father: the corollary witch, who would be the Medusa of myth, or the wicked stepmother of the stories, or Coleridge's nightmare life in death—that figure who is so often confused with female or mother that Graves scrambles them together as his White Goddess: the scavenger, or the opportunist, who hangs about the false situation, and is created by it: and the dead alive who do not care any longer what does happen.

The kin, as I've used them here, are those things in ourselves or in others which are human: and the three angels the three basic human figures—man as actual man, woman as actual woman, child as actual child—whose accurate relationship with each other, and whose union against the non-human is all important if the world is ever to be their world. (And nothing sounds more artificial and labored than a fuller explanation in prose of content you have fulfilled in a poem only by a kind of spatter-dash.)

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In looking over some of my older work recently, it strikes me how long I've actually been occupied with this theme, among others, without being literally aware of it. Here's a poem which was done some years ago under very different circumstances, and with, as I believed, very different content:

JOURNEY*

Down, down his days goes
Like emigrant, or believer.

At the name that cannot be spelled
Hails stranger: *what is this place?*

Receives no answer.

Shoulder by shoulder
The relatives
Walk together like two in fog. In the valley
The waters spout and spring:

pass by.

The wells are marked
With the double bone.

If you go as far as the Tall House
Take a messenger.

The orchards dangle with bells:

Pass by:
the cities also.

The great wheels whirling their blackbirds.

O tall surveyor, mourner, counter of coins,
Fearing the gaunt old woman and the second-hand man:
Fearing the cat that will appear two colors
And the dead man under the gables
Who should have been destroyed in August—

Where do the six trails go?

That are colored like Iroquois?

What are the mountains named

Pour out their primrose?

What tilting Danubes

Shoulder by shoulder

The relatives

Are turning their heads like bundles.

They carry the charms:

The key like an ace,

The terrier, the crooked puzzle:

Comfort themselves with the old diseases

Darling as brooches.

O book-maker, holder of crosses like cones

The hangman waits beside the pendulum: beside his pools

The cruel miller.

Are the plains all crossed

By the dark meridians?

Is the cleated panther

Awake among his hills?

Down, down his days goes

Like spy or unbeliever:

In the rusty valley

The big bones are lying like tools.

Are the serpents destroyed

In the Tetons? Do the rivers rise in their halls?

What follows, follows,

Howls like a dry machine

At traveller?

Receives no answer.

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The journey here of course is anybody's journey. He always enters upon it as a believer. But the name of the place cannot be spelled because then we would know its true nature, what it should be.

Again, the relatives walk together: but never know each other because of the fog between. There are orchards and wells but he believes them poisoned.

He fears, as he should, the gaunt old woman (who will appear so often in the legend as the hag), and the second-hand man (and this is an entirely unconscious pun for the supplanter, or the carbon copy, of the man). He fears the dead man, or the walking dead. He knows the trails and mountains are there, but cannot reach them.

And the relatives (the kin again) carry their heads like bundles, the contents of which they do not even know. They have the charms, and even the key which is the ace, but do not use them: they also carry the terror, and the crooked puzzle—or the labyrinth in their own minds, and comfort themselves with the ancient sicknesses that are actually dearer than the reality they might have. Meanwhile, in the rusty valley are lying the larger bones of the actual inheritance.

There are other elements here of course (you will observe an unpremeditated use of Eliot's hanged man, as well as the valley of dry bones)—and another thread which runs through, but it's the occurrence of this particular theme which in two instances I did not know I was using which I find interesting in reviewing *Journey*.

In neither poem do I find this content developed with anything like precision or completeness. Yet there must be a way in which content that has already focussed in the mind

as idea can be approached with greater directness and fulfillment.

To be able to think through what you want to say, then to pass the assignment down to that part of the mind that knows how to write poetry, and have it played back to you as a better poem than you knew how to write — that's my idea of the way it should be done. Someday I hope to be able to do it that way.

However I've come to the conclusion that what you always work on consciously, no matter what you want to say, is the pattern of saying it. An effective line, no matter how you intend it or what you think you are saying always has meaning: and often something far more accurate than you intend.

Perhaps after all it's a matter of approaching your themes a thousand times and from a thousand directions: of simply writing enough poetry so that finally what you want to say is bracketed.

And perhaps the dilemma of knowing what you want to say right out in daylight can give you a means of selecting, or organizing, or directing what comes out as poetry.

Regards,

Jeanne McGahey

(*JOURNEY was first published in *The Quarterly Review of Literature*.)

This is the second article in Number Magazine's series by various writers on their own problems and methods of work.

EMILY WHITE

EVER IN SPRING

Ever the rising floodlights
Of the sky's flotsam,
And the rest in special places of the eye
Lapping the sky's rust,
And the lustre faces of stars float
In the steel-blue bloom of cheek.

Ever the horizon receives its trees,
And the vascular flesh
 plods with the weight of its
 stem clipped
And the sedum falls
And the scant birds
Revolve.

Ever in spring
 the mere grass
Carries his capers
 like cuts,

Flows from the rotted stump
The briar's bitter treacle.

So walks my snake
 shoulderless,
And a flicker of blackbirds
 daunts my head.

Ever in spring
Trinkets of bees
 and the flocked dawn.

THOMAS JAYNES

I

There has been time enough and I have used it all
In keeping up the faces I have worn:
The time, not watched, and the habit have been the ease
With which I have postponed the hard beginning
Of some direction of the heart enjoined strictly on the mind
In use and custom that ignores the face it forms.

II

When age as it applies to me
Survives the strength variety and waste of my desires—
When my own age has fairly settled
In its higher brackets
What close relatives of my brain
And discoveries of old sense
Will still accompany, be recognized,
Hold some power to agitate?
I think it will be aloof,
Lingering without answers,
And clutching to itself discoveries
Of new desires.

BOOK REVIEWS

THE AGE OF CRITICISM

POETRY AND THE AGE. By Randall Jarrell. New York: Vintage Books; 246 pp.; 95¢.

BEYOND CRITICISM. By Karl Shapiro. Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press; 73 pp.; \$3.00.

CERBERUS. By Louis Dudek, Irving Layton and Raymond Souster. Toronto, Ont., Canada; Contact Press; 98 pp.; no price listed.

Poetry and the Age is a collection of Randall Jarrell's poetic reviews and criticism. Valuable as criticism, yet it is most interesting as being, inadvertently and indirectly, a revelation of the attitudes of the good critic in our time, and a definition of his most serviceable faults and virtues. Mr. Jarrell indicates, for instance, the one chief use which such a critic will have for his fellow writer: and it is not the basic one of giving him some help in solving his creative problems.

Of course a Pound or Mallarme — not merely a good critic but an original one — is willing to attempt these problems — willing if necessary to cut across the opinion of his time, for the purpose of dealing directly with the question of the making of good poetry. But the merely good critic — Mr. Jarrell calls him "the viable critic" — is more modest. For he seems to take, almost for fact itself, the majority opinion of his most respected colleagues. This opinion to be examined, but not to be looked past or looked around.

Thus Mr. Jarrell would not be likely to begin a truly new examination of certain writers — Marianne Moore, for instance, or Wallace Stevens or W. C. Williams. But his criticism must be limited by his acceptances.

This does not mean that his range is narrow, or that he does not perform a fundamental function. In his evaluation of Frost, for instance, Mr. Jarrell has much to say which is entirely basic. Frost's best admirers may wonder indeed if a good critic is now less willing to criticize than to admire. But developing, as "the viable critic" does, the critical decisions of his generation, Mr. Jarrell discovers to us the good and valid reasons for our approval. And in doing so, I suppose he has made our best commentary, by far, on Robert Frost. However I do not mean to evaluate the critic so much by rank as by uses. Whether the original critic is greater than the good critic is not the question. He can hardly perform the work of the good critic; and it is necessary work.

This is, I think, exactly the function of the good critic: to define the literary opinion of the age, set the climate, fix that literary atmosphere which makes a modern a modern, the Victorian a Victorian.

In contrast, such a critic as Pound was not of his age, but cut across the whole literary judgment of his time to create the time we know.

In *Beyond Criticism*, Karl Shapiro deals with some basic concepts. He assumes that there are four—at least four—modes of knowing, which he defines. None of these is dependent upon the others, although related to them. And poetic knowledge, one sort of knowledge by pattern—is itself a variant of one of these basic ways of knowing our universe: i.e., the artistic mode. Of course the universe known is a universe of experience, differing, in the very act of knowing, from the scientist's universe. But this, if I understand him, is itself part of what Mr. Shapiro means to say.

Mr. Shapiro, as usual, writes with premises I can accept and comes to conclusions I can accept. Therefore I merely

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have to discard the process of reasoning between the two, and build for myself a new structure, from his premises to his equally valuable conclusions. Which makes reading his criticism exciting.

Cerberus, poetry plus critical polemic by three Canadian writers, is most interesting as commentary. It could hardly be important in the critical context of Jarrell and Shapiro, except as representing a repeating and continuing attitude of a percentage of the poets of the time. This is best represented by Irving Layton—the second of the three—who seems to feel that rebellion, poetic ferment, etc., which he considers desirable, have as their principal enemies gentility, propriety and respectability, which he considers undesirable.

Perhaps what such a writer really wants is a return to the period of unrestrained experimentalism. Mr. Layton, sir, it has been tried. But it is now 1955, and the last valid experimental poet appeared at the latest in the early thirties. Not that new experimentation might not have value, but that experimentation seems now to be mere endless repetitions of the same discoveries.

The proper work of the contemporary poet, and as I think, the contemporary critic, is not likely to be done through new experimentation: but by the building of a literary tradition for coherent use of the new techniques which the writers of the actual experimental period discovered to us. Not to hack out of stone new forms for new tools, but to learn some skill in using those we have.

II

In "The Age of Criticism", one essay in *Poetry and the Age*, Mr. Jarrell considers the overwhelming massiveness of today's criticism. Comparing himself to Johnson in his *Fit of*

Rhyme Against Rhyme, he gives examples of the aggressiveness of this criticism, and deplores it. But to summarize, he merely says that criticism must serve poetry: which is merely true.

Yet if it were true that writers of poetry in our time literally did not know how to go on from here—if in the midst of the vast new technical armament of poetry they were stopped and amazed, it might be supposed that many of them would turn from poetry to poetic criticism, and that such an attempt to reason their way out of their difficulty might be the most straightforward thing they could do.

A glance at contemporary poetry shows, as I believe, that no new poet has appeared since the early thirties who even approaches major importance. And one cannot help feeling that this should not be a day of lesser talents, yet it was only in the early years of our poetic age, when what was newly done was done with excitement—only in those days were minor writers able to work with some reality, and hence create that fortunate climate which allowed the appearance of greater talents.

As to our present poets, I think it can be shown—except for those who have partially given up on modern techniques—that truly they write lines rather than poems.

Some of these lines will be extremely brilliant, and I suppose it would not be possible to find much such brilliance in the English language before our century. But in every case there are lacunae, intervals sometimes short, sometimes of a number of lines, in which the writer is not writing poetry, but a sort of dressed up prose. However short the intervals, the quality of the poem as a poem is generally destroyed: as if a musician should play a few brilliant bars and then give a prose explanation in place of the next few

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measures, then return to his music, and so on.

It is true, I think, that the contemporary poet, with his packed line, and his hard and spectacular imagery, has problems of organization which are most difficult, compared to those of the writer in the earlier periods. For the earlier writer used the occasional image and as a usual thing a much milder one. And it is interesting to see in the French Symbolists a similar early brilliance, with a similar falling off in poetic validity. Our contemporaries work in related techniques: it is possible they have come, not to a new, but to the same impasse.

I think the explanation is to be found partly by reference to the changes in our civilization, which our poetry seems to interpret so accurately. For no greater change in man's material culture can be remembered than that which occurred within our own last century. And though we live with the knowledge of destruction, yet there are new beginnings—belonging as it seems to a society which is entering upon, not ending, its time of creative civilization.

That the artist responded to a new material civilization with new methods to fit new sensibility, is of course evident. But also it should be evident that in poetry at least we have no tradition for expressing the new content or using the new poetic devices. Only the brilliant undifferentiated, partially understood beginnings of techniques worked out during the experimental period before 1930—used with sufficient skill, perhaps, by no other poet than Eliot, and perhaps at times by Auden.

If this is true, and I believe it is demonstrably true, the interest of the contemporary writer in criticism is not only creditable but necessary, and the massiveness of critical writing—poor as Mr. Jarrell asserts it to be in most cases—

is responsible to the writers' need.

What I mean by this is that a tradition based on experimental work might gradually be evolved over many decades. But in our day the writer who wishes to do good work will have to do a little critical thinking as to the new techniques in which we are working and the new content which is valid in these techniques. To use a word from mathematics, he will have to extrapolate, for his present use, a tradition which should be evolved along the main line of poetry which we inherit from the French Romantic poets.

Lawrence Hart

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